Changing roles

The music co-ordinator in the primary school

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Since the introduction of the *National Curriculum for Music* (1991, revised 2000) a growing number of composers, conductors, musicians and music educators have expressed concern about the quality of 'musical literacy' in primary schools today (*Music Teacher*, 2003). Their strongly voiced concern helped to prompt the publication of *The Music Manifesto*[1] and the government's recognition of the centrality of music in children's education and its relevance to their broader artistic development. The government also accepted that at the moment 'there is currently insufficient depth within the teaching profession to guarantee all young children a high-quality and well balanced music education' (Milliband, 2004).

The Music Manifesto, and the government response, led to renewed interest in primary school music. Through their support of the generalist class teacher,[2] and the class teacher system, the government tried to raise the profile of the curriculum co-ordinator's role in implementing the National Curriculum for Music. However, whilst any support for music development in primary schools is to be welcomed, it is not obvious that such an approach will be effective. In the light of the National Curriculum Council's framework for the primary school curriculum co-ordinator (1989) and subsequent OfStEd reports (1994, 1995, 1998) it seems that the role of the co-ordinator is not an easy one to discharge effectively. Is it possible for music co-ordinators to support their colleagues and bridge the gulf between subject matter to be taught and the subject knowledge of the generalist teacher (Button and Potter, 1999)? Can music co-ordinators support their colleagues in pedagogy and enable generalist primary teachers to meet quality assurance standards in a subject in which they have, traditionally, felt under-qualified and lacking in confidence (Hennessy, 2000)? It may seem like a promising model, but current debate seems to suggest otherwise (Bariseri, 2000; Holden and Button, 2006). The role of the curriculum co-ordinator remains ambiguous and ill defined, and it is still the subject of debate (Heneghan, 2001).

Background

Although OfStEd (1994, 1995, 1998) advocated some subject specialism in the later stages of Key stage 2, the reports acknowledged that generalist class teachers were in the best position to integrate music into the primary curriculum in a progressive and coherent way. However, Alexander (1994) questioned the ability of generalist teachers to recognise a child's potential in music if their own understanding of the subject was limited. Moreover, in schools where co-ordinators have been appointed there has been a tendency to deploy them as specialists rather than consultants, to use them 'to do the music' rather than to support the generalist teacher in his or her teaching of music (Bariseri, 2000). In situations like this the generalist class teacher is unlikely to acquire the necessary skills and experience to teach music effectively (Holden and Button, 2006). Class teachers have expressed feelings of 'inadequacy, indifference, nervousness and fear' with regard to the implementation of the music curriculum (Heneghan, 2001).

Many music educators (for example, Mills, 1989, 1995, 1997; Glover and Ward, 1993; Stocks, 1998; Hennessy, 2000) argue that it is the generalist teacher, supported by the music co-ordinator, acting as a consultant, who is best placed to teach music. They believe that the co-ordinator should work towards raising the confidence of the generalist teacher by increasing their subject knowledge through the provision of in-service training, by guiding them to appropriate sources and by giving them professional in-class support. This kind of support, they believe, could enable the non-specialist to teach music effectively.

However, success in deploying the music co-ordinator and determining the context in which he or she works is largely dependent on the head teacher being able to manage their specialist knowledge, their skills and their professional expertise (Bariseri, 2000). This is not easy to achieve, given some of the tensions experienced by music co-ordinators while endeavouring to meet their role expectations. OfStEd (DfEE, 1993, 1995), Stocks (1998), Bariseri (2000) and Heneghan (2001) pointed to key difficulties which made it hard for co-ordinators to fulfil their roles effectively. In particular, they identified the shortage of funds and the excessive teacher work loads since the introduction of the 1988 Education Act. Furthermore, regular non-contact time made available to co-ordinators for the support of their colleagues was rarely provided. In practice, few co-ordinators found time during the school day to support other colleagues in their teaching of music. They rarely entered other classrooms or schools during working hours (Button and Potter, 1999).

Music co-ordinators, in trying to meet their role expectations, have highlighted feelings of ambiguity in relations with class teachers, whose view of classroom autonomy may easily clash with the leadership role adopted by the co-ordinator (Holden and Button, 2006). Class teachers are, traditionally, responsible for their classes and may argue that co-ordinators are not necessarily more experienced, or better qualified, than themselves. Teachers are not always willing to avail themselves of the opportunity to learn from co-

ordinators or to explore new developments in music within the context of their classroom. Indeed, many teachers feel uncomfortable with the presence of the co-ordinator in their classroom (Potter and Button, 1999). It is clear that the expectations of teachers and head teachers concerning the role of the music co-ordinator are not always in agreement.

It was against this background that an exploratory study was initiated to see if the music co-ordinator could realise the role expectations demanded of him or her by the head teacher, the local education authority and the inspectorate, and whether the desire for improved 'musical literacy' could be met through the music co-ordinator and class teacher system.

Methodology

This article reports on the exploratory study into the role of the music co-ordinator in the primary school. In the light of the contextual background outlined above, three research questions were raised to define the nature and scope of the study. The research questions were:

1 How do practising music co-ordinators perceive their role in the primary school?
2 How do head teachers from schools with music co-ordinators perceive the role of the music co-ordinator?
3 How can the role of the music co-ordinator be developed so that it can be more effective?

The data for this study were collected through open-ended questionnaires (first phase) and semi-structured interviews (second phase).

First phase

Data for the first phase of the research programme were gathered through the use of questionnaires. Separate questionnaires were designed for the music co-ordinators and for the head teachers participating in the study.

Data were gathered from the music co-ordinators through open-ended questionnaires designed to see how they perceived their role and how they could contribute more effectively. The open-ended questions enabled the respondents to identify those aspects of their role that were most important to them and provided grounded data that would enable comparisons and correlations to be drawn. The questions were grouped under three key areas: co-ordinator training, collegial support and curriculum administration and development.

The questionnaire directed to the music co-ordinators contained twenty-six statements and was divided into four sections. The first section sought background information about each respondent's gender, age, academic background and teaching experience. The second section was a set of seven statements related to the co-ordinator's training and included his or her experience of in-service courses. The third section contained eight statements

designed to reveal specific assumptions relating to the support given to the generalist teachers by the respondents. The final section, of six questions, concentrated on curriculum administration and development.

Data were gathered from the head teachers by the use of an open-ended questionnaire which gave the respondents the opportunity to explain how they perceived the role of the music co-ordinator in their school, to identify the responsibilities the co-ordinators were given and to describe the training they should receive. The open-ended questions were designed to enable head teachers to comment on relevant issues of immediate concern to them.

Following appropriate piloting and modification, the questionnaires were mailed to thirty-six schools, identified by local authority advisory staff, known to have employed a member of staff as a music co-ordinator, twenty of whom returned the completed instruments, yielding a response rate of 55.5 per cent.

Second phase

The grounded data from both sets of respondents would enable comparisons to be made between their different perceptions of the role of the music co-ordinator. These data also enabled the researchers to design two sets of semi-structured interviews for the second phase of the research programme, one directed to the music co-ordinators and the other to the head teachers. With this information, the interviews could be developed around the interests of the respondents and would reflect the perceptions of both groups. The interviews provided an opportunity to test and validate the data gathered in the first phase, and they also enabled the music co-ordinators and the head teachers to reflect upon and develop the issues presented in the completed questionnaires.

Each interview followed the same format and averaged between twenty and thirty minutes. All interviews were completed by the same researcher. Field notes were taken throughout each interview and then read back to the respondents to ensure an accurate interpretation of their views. This approach enabled the researcher to seek clarification and introduce follow-up probes. It also gave the respondents the chance to develop their answers, if appropriate. These interviews provided for a deeper exploration of the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the two groups of respondents.

Sample

The twenty primary schools in the sample included four urban schools, six suburban schools, seven small-town schools and three rural schools. The sample was designed to be representative of the primary schools in one county in the north-east of England. The sample included thirteen primary, five junior and two infant schools. Of the twenty music co-ordinators from these schools 65 per cent were female and 35 per cent were male teachers.

Their ages ranged from twenty-four to fifty-three. Sixty-one per cent were between twenty-four and thirty years, 22 per cent were between thirty-one and forty years and 17 per cent were between forty-one and fifty-three years. Although this group of music co-ordinators carried responsibility for developing their subject throughout their respective schools, their role did not include a place in the management hierarchy.

Analysis: summary of results

The perceptions of the music co-ordinators

Co-ordinator training

Data from the questionnaire directed to the music co-ordinators revealed that, whilst six of the co-ordinators (out of twenty) had been to music college, they said they did not receive specific training for their role as co-ordinators. Two respondents claimed their experience of being the music co-ordinator provided them with a certain degree of training as they learned their way into the role. The most recently qualified co-ordinator had pursued a three-year education course with little input in relation to music, role responsibility or managing human resources. Two of the co-ordinators were appointed because of their personal interest in music. Neither of them had studied music at college in any depth, but both had received some in-service training. The remaining respondents stated that their degree course in education did not equip them for teaching music effectively.

The co-ordinators clearly had very different experiences of in-service training and of the opportunities it provided for helping them to develop their role. This was evident at interview. Generally, respondents thought the courses they had attended lacked sufficient depth to aid them as music co-ordinators, particularly in managing human resources. All affirmed they required more guidance in developing and realising role expectations. This worried the co-ordinators, for they felt they could not properly meet their responsibilities within the school.

Collegial support

Although the co-ordinators thought that music was one of the subjects many teachers avoided, they were able to identify ways in which they had been able to support their colleagues in their music teaching. Even so, it was clearly not easy. Whilst two of the co-ordinators believed they had some influence on their colleagues' music teaching, they found it difficult to be supportive without being too critical. One respondent believed she had written user-friendly guidelines and had provided a successful in-service training session on how to implement her guidelines in a progressive way. However, she still qualified this statement by saying that in-service training sessions were too infrequent. Another co-ordinator made reference to the importance of providing in-service training to allay colleagues' anxiety in delivering the National Curriculum for Music effectively. She also involved school governors in the

implementation of her music scheme. One co-ordinator opined it was important for co-ordinators to set an example for colleagues through exemplary teaching. However, she pointed out that this could, in some cases, serve only to undermine the confidence of the generalist teacher.

Data from the interview suggested that most of the co-ordinators (seventeen out of twenty) thought they had little influence over colleagues, and they believed this reflected the weakness of their position in the management hierarchy. They also found it difficult to deal with some colleagues' negative attitudes. They thought this was particularly true of older members of staff. Some of these respondents felt embarrassed about this part of their role and disliked their exposure to the professional scrutiny of colleagues. They all averred that their relationship with the generalist teachers was the key to success in their role and to meeting quality assurance.

Curriculum administration and development

According to the questionnaire and interview data the co-ordinators accepted that it was their responsibility to devise the music policy, produce a scheme of work and advise on the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and the QCA document *Music: a Scheme of Work for Key Stages 1 and 2*. The respondents acknowledged the importance of offering pedagogical advice and developing subject knowledge. In most cases, co-ordinators accepted that the National Curriculum document and most of the available published material were exacting for the non-specialist to decipher and understand. However, they thought that time did not allow them to fulfil these responsibilities very effectively. Those who did manage to get opportunities to work with the generalist teachers had to meet them at lunchtime or at the end of the school day.

In four of the schools surveyed, groups of teachers worked in consultation with the music co-ordinator at all stages, from initial stage and draft stage to the finalisation of policies and schemes. In the remaining schools the co-ordinators were wholly responsible for devising the music policy and scheme. The draft proposals were presented to the staff for consultation but in all cases they were accepted without amendment. Music co-ordinators in these schools organised meetings to discuss how to implement policies and schemes effectively.

The perceptions of head teachers

Co-ordinator training

An analysis of the head teachers' questionnaire and interview data indicated that they all thought the co-ordinators should undertake a course of training for their expanding role, but they had different views about the content of the course. For example, several head teachers (seven out of twenty) suggested that co-ordinators should be trained in curriculum planning (three out of seven), assessment procedures (two out of seven) and the management of colleagues (two out of seven). Some head teachers (six out of twenty) felt that

the training should help co-ordinators to appreciate the skills required to deliver the content of the National Curriculum for Music (two out of six), to familiarise themselves with resources, to manage meetings (one out of six) and to provide exemplary practice (three out of six). Five head teachers (five out of twenty) thought that music co-ordinators should be constantly updating their knowledge through in-service training (two out of five), advising colleagues on teaching methods, assessment and curriculum innovation (three out of five). Two head teachers (out of twenty) believed that music co-ordinators should possess an overview of their subject but should appreciate that music co-ordination does not mean taking sole responsibility for their subject.

Not unexpectedly, all head teachers agreed that training should be the responsibility of the schools and the local education authorities. If necessary, outside agencies should be used when adequate provision could not be provided from within the school and the authority. The external agencies identified were advisers, governors, secondary head teachers and nursery teachers. The head teachers clearly thought that the music co-ordinators should work with the school management team to identify needs and areas of development for their respective schools and should evaluate the appropriateness of local educational authority courses and in-service provision. They should also be encouraged to attend any relevant courses.

Collegial support

Each of the head teachers emphasised that the music co-ordinator should display enthusiasm and expertise, and possess the ability to develop the confidence of the generalist teacher in his or her ability to deliver the music curriculum effectively. They thought the co-ordinator should provide suitable in-service courses for colleagues and bring together teams with common objectives. One head teacher was adamant that the quality of the co-ordinator's teaching ability was paramount and that this could determine how successful he or she would be in promoting the subject to colleagues. In addition, this respondent said during interview that initiative, imagination, vitality and general optimism were important characteristics in realising the role expectations of the music co-ordinator.

Curriculum administration and development

The data from the head teachers' questionnaire also revealed that each head teacher believed that the music co-ordinator must impart advice, produce schemes of work (and scrutinise their implementation) and manage resources. However, there was some disparity between respondents as to how this might best be achieved. Nearly half the head teachers (nine out of twenty) thought the co-ordinator should have complete autonomy and take full responsibility for managing curriculum development. However, the remaining respondents (eleven out of twenty) stated that the music co-ordinator should liaise with the head teacher and other members of staff. One head teacher emphasised the need to create a supportive climate in order to

elicit the best out of the music co-ordinator in producing documentation for teaching purposes.

The head teachers thought that the music co-ordinators should have a clear overview of their subject area and be able to ensure progression across key stages. They said that funding for curriculum development needed to be increased so that staffing levels could be improved and the co-ordinators given more time to fulfil their duties. Furthermore, head teachers accepted that staff consciousness should be raised with respect to the co-ordinator's role in developing the curriculum, so that the expectations of teachers, co-ordinators and head teachers might fall into line.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide some insight into the difficulties experienced by the music co-ordinators taking part in the study. These findings are discussed and consequent implications are drawn in relation to music education.

Co-ordinator training

The music co-ordinators cited better training as a means of increasing effectiveness, but there was a disparity between the co-ordinators' and head teachers' views with regard to the amount and type of training. Only a small number of co-ordinators had attended a local education authority course which focused in some way on role responsibility. None of those questioned had attended courses which provided help with time management and the acquisition of interpersonal skills. In fact, respondents revealed they had not been trained in the necessary personal skills required for managing colleagues.

This has implications for providers of pre-service and in-service courses, as it is important to reconceptualise the in-service training of music co-ordinators. These courses should offer training, for example, in pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman,1989), in-depth subject knowledge, curriculum innovation, the optimal use of time and the development of resources. Moreover, it seems essential that any course should also focus on the co-ordination of people and process and on the development of the consultancy skills that will help co-ordinators to realise their role expectations. We argue that training of this type will generate co-ordinator self-confidence and raise the status of the role among members of staff. It should also provide generally accepted expectations for the role, and enable the co-ordinator to become a more effective agent for change and development.

Collegial support

All the co-ordinators said that it was crucial to support colleagues in school-based in-service training. They thought that the content of courses should be

their responsibility. However, the music co-ordinators expressed their dissatisfaction with the sporadic approach to in-service sessions in music. These, they argued, were an inadequate way of promoting colleagues' musical development, confidence and self-esteem. They advocated a series of in-service training sessions which would promote continuity and coherence. They wanted a step-by-step approach, with each session building on the previous one, for they thought this would radically improve the competence of the non-music specialist. Moreover, we believe that the emphasis of this training should be on subject knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman,1989) and the teaching of musical notation.

Several of the co-ordinators pointed to the apparent lack of interest in music and music co-ordinators displayed by some colleagues, and especially to their indifference to partnership teaching. Co-ordinators found this indifference hard to overcome and, at times, it sullied the atmosphere when they were trying to support their colleagues. Again, this refers back to the lack of training given to co-ordinators to help them manage their role within the school and the classroom. Supporting colleagues in their classroom is, according to the co-ordinators, the *sine qua non* of a model which sets out to develop the children's learning in music within the class teacher system. Head teachers, therefore, may need to reconsider the support they give to the music co-ordinator and work with the co-ordinator in determining what needs to be done to realise agreed targets.

Furthermore, the data suggest the need for a collegial strategy, especially for those schools that operate on a fairly traditional line management approach to authority and responsibility. Although these structures are often benign and based on good personal relations, they are still hierarchical. This traditional model perhaps needs to be reconceptualised, as those schools that have embraced a more collegial approach are more likely to be able to cope with demands for increased specialism. Moreover, as music specialists may well be younger teachers, there may be a need to establish an ethos whereby all are learning from one another through sharing good practice and developing co-operation.

In our view, a school that is based on co-operation is also in a better position to utilise the expertise of its staff, offer sources of stimulation and enrichment that will facilitate their personal development, foster positive attitudes and encourage the adoption of new ways of working. At the same time, teachers must be granted sufficient autonomy to make the decisions which take into consideration the different learning requirements of children and the 'uniqueness of every encounter that occurs' in the classroom (Ainscow, 2000). We are sure that a well co-ordinated, co-operative approach is more likely to create a positive working atmosphere. The teachers (as co-ordinators and as generalist teachers) should have the confidence to experiment and to search for the most suitable teaching strategies to improve learning in music and to enable them to contribute to a better dissemination of musical knowledge.

Central to this collegial strategy is partnership teaching. This is a powerful contributory factor to co-ordinator effectiveness. We believe partnership

teaching fosters professional growth and development through bringing together people with different skills and experiences. It promotes an opportunity for the dissemination of new knowledge and the implementation of new initiatives. Communication is improved through collaboration, allowing problems to be identified, shared and tackled. The social dimension, too, enhances the quality of the workplace, fosters trust and co-operation, and should help to resolve issues of status which can be neutralised by a consensus of opinions (Morrison, 1996). Partnership teaching can lead to new ways of working and provide stimulation, enrichment and empowerment for the class teacher in the context of the classroom. It creates a feeling of identity and commitment to school improvement, and avoids isolated teachers becoming a barrier to school improvement (Ainscow, 2000). It all depends upon the development of a co-operative relationship between generalist teachers and the co-ordinator.

Curriculum administration and development

Half the head teachers (ten out of twenty) thought that the curriculum co-ordinators should be accountable for providing discussion documentation, curriculum implementation, policies and schemes of work. They thought the music co-ordinator should possess a clear overview of their subject across the key stages, keep abreast of relevant information and disseminate it, where appropriate, to colleagues. However, the head teachers did not expect the co-ordinator to accept total responsibility for all musical assessment. This view is different from that of the music co-ordinators. They argue that only a music expert can provide the range and quality of the differentiated learning activities required in each classroom as well as the close relationship that has to be established between musical content and what is being assessed.

The co-ordinators thought the language of the music documentation produced some difficulties for many of the generalist teachers and did little to develop their confidence in teaching music. Generalist teachers often found it hard to understand the technical terminology used in published resources and National Curriculum documents. Whilst appreciating the problem, the music co-ordinators found it difficult to make the documentation more accessible to the generalist teacher. If this was to be resolved, the co-ordinators would need to consider providing training for teachers that bridges the gap between theory and practice which so often exists between schemes of work and their implementation (Ainscow, 2000). Equally, the co-ordinator should engage the class teacher in matters of policy formulation, especially as teachers have a vested interest in documentation effectiveness and its implementation.

All respondents, both the head teachers and the music co-ordinators, thought that curriculum development was a key issue, but the research highlighted an imbalance between the co-ordinators' and the head teachers' views. We argue that a way to resolve this imbalance is for the head teacher to perceive the co-ordinator as an important contributor to curriculum devel-

opment and quality assurance. The music co-ordinator should be contributing to the whole school development and the head teacher should encourage the co-ordinator to undertake normative, strategic and operational planning in respect of the music curriculum. We believe this would foster higher standards of 'musical literacy' – through maximising learning time and through helping colleagues to translate the content of the music curriculum into practice (Ainscow, 2000).

Furthermore, there is a wider consideration here, as society, *per se*, exerts an influence on the curriculum. Since Mills (1989, 1995, 1997), Glover and Ward (1993), Bariseri (2000) and Heneghan (2001) have argued that music is for all and a valued component of life, then it must, therefore, be an important part of the school curriculum. Consequently the music curriculum ought to be perceived as a synthesis between the requirements of society for music and the need of schools to implement the music curriculum effectively. Therefore curriculum development in music is important in order to maintain equality between 'culture in the society and culture in the schools' (Barisseri, 2000). Additionally, if society accepts the 'music for all' viewpoint, then it is reasonable to expect that music should be mediated through the class teacher system, supported by the music co-ordinator.

Societal expectations today also require teachers to be accountable in their approach to teaching and learning in a way that can be assessed (Carre, 1993). But to achieve this requires the generalist teacher to assimilate musical skills of increasing complexity in order to maintain quality assurance standards in music. However, research suggests many unaided generalist teachers, judging from their self-perceptions, are unable to meet quality assurance standards (Button and Holden, 2006). Consequently, this has relevance for government-led initiatives and, in particular, *Excellence and Enjoyment: a Strategy for Primary Schools* (2003) with its emphasis on children's cultural and aesthetic development.

Excellence and Enjoyment requires teachers to assume responsibility for developing positive learning environments where learning is focused on individual children's needs. Teachers are required to provide the children with a rich learning experience in which all subjects are taught 'outstandingly' well. Teachers are also encouraged to develop assessment for learning, which is then fed back into planning and used to inform the way children 'are taught and learn'. Moreover, teachers are expected to bring together the different skills from each National Curriculum subject and use these to ensure children are 'acquiring a wide range of skills as they learn' (DfES, 2003). Without the intervention of a music co-ordinator many generalist teachers will be unable to realise some of the objectives set out in the primary strategy document with respect to music.

Conclusion

The research highlights that not all schools are exploiting fully the potential of the music co-ordinator. If co-ordinator effectiveness is to increase, then

music co-ordinators ought to be encouraged to utilise their skills in situations which require them to apply their professional judgement and expertise in a climate of mutual trust. This would maximise the commitment, enthusiasm and energy of the music co-ordinator, contribute to quality assurance standards and enrich the children's experience of music in their schools. Additionally, there is an urgent need for more highly trained and better qualified music specialists acting in an advisory capacity to mediate the National Curriculum for Music through the class teacher system. This is essential if the music potential of *all* children is to be realised.

Notes

1 The Music Manifesto (2003) is a campaign for improvement in music education in England. Its purpose is to provide better opportunities for children and young people to develop their musical potential. It has five main aims: (1) to provide every young person with first access to a range of musical experiences; (2) to provide more opportunities for young people to deepen and broaden their music interests and skills; (3) to identify and nurture our most talented young musicians; (4) to develop a world-class work force in music education; (5) to improve the support structures for young people's music making (DfEE, 2003).

2 For the purposes of this article the generalist class teacher is a teacher who teaches all subjects of the National Curriculum but who has probably had very little musical training or none at all. A generalist class teacher can also be a co-ordinator in another area of the curriculum. What marks out the music co-ordinator from other co-ordinators is the need to work regularly and frequently alongside the generalist class teacher in the classroom.

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